

POWER AND DISUNITY: HOW POWER INTERACTS WITH INTRA-PARTY UNITY.

AN ANALYSIS LOOKING AT UK MPS LOSING OR RESIGNING WHIP FROM 1950 TO 2022

BACKGROUND

During the past few years, we have seen that in America, the Republican Party engaged in a civil war among themselves after winning a narrow majority. As such, I would like to look at whether there is a connection between being in power and disunity within a parliamentary party.

I will be looking at UK MPs, as they could lose or resign their whip, which should be the ultimate sign of disunity within the parliamentary party.

HYPOTHESES

Length of time in power

Longer time in power lowers unity

- After getting into power, things get real and people get into arguments over their policy priorities. The differences accumulate and lead to a breaking point where the MPs resign the whip, or the whip removes the whip. Longer time in power increases unity.
- As time goes on, the government MPs would settle down in their job and how they interact with others, increasing unity.

Length of time not in power

Longer time out of power increases unity

- After the party got out of power, we expect there to be a post-mortem report as to why they lost, and that might involve blaming a certain character or faction in the party, leading to disunity. As time passes and the party doesn't get into power, the party would likely move on from blaming and unite in the overarching aim of getting into power.

Leadership change lowers unity

- There are usually struggles within the party to get the old leader out, and in the leader election, as such, exacerbating the current rifts, lowering unity.

Poor economic conditions lower unity

- When the economic situation is poor, such as high inflation and low growth, the party in power would get into infighting, and individual MPs would face great electoral pressure within their individual constituency, increasing disunity.

LIMITATIONS

Limited data points

- Due to the limitation of data and concern over changing political norms if we start much earlier in history, the data points are limited and lead to difficulty in drawing statistically significant conclusions other than length in power.

Low R² value

- The models can only explain a small proportion of the variation of MPs losing or resigning the whip.

Is losing or resigning the whip a good proxy?

- It measures extreme disunity and is usually concentrated around events.

DATA COLLECTION AND CLEANING

The data were obtained from the House of Commons Library, Twentieth-Century British Political Facts, BBC, The Guardian, and the Office of National Statistics.

The reason for the MP losing or resigning the whip is classified into political and non-political reasons to exclude the non-political reasons.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>								
	ln(count of MPs losing or resigning the whip+1)								
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
In Power	-0.201 (0.158)	-0.221 (0.202)	-0.186 (0.159)	0.092 (0.113)	-0.158 (0.166)	-0.270 (0.191)	-0.168 (0.235)	-0.122 (0.220)	-0.168 (0.235)
GDP Growth						-0.018 (0.032)			
Inflation							0.006 (0.019)		0.006 (0.019)
Margin of Majority								-0.0001 (0.002)	
Years in Power	0.039** (0.016)	0.039** (0.016)	0.043** (0.016)		0.035** (0.017)	0.040** (0.016)	0.039** (0.018)	0.042** (0.017)	0.039** (0.018)
Years Not in Power		-0.003 (0.020)							
Labor Party			0.120 (0.118)						
Leadership Change ±1 Year				0.179 (0.113)	0.106 (0.117)				
In Power:GDP Growth						0.028 (0.043)			
In Power:Inflation							-0.006 (0.026)		-0.006 (0.026)
In Power:Margin of Majority								-0.001 (0.002)	
Constant	0.318*** (0.082)	0.339** (0.150)	0.238** (0.114)	0.228** (0.101)	0.265*** (0.101)	0.361*** (0.110)	0.290** (0.127)	0.329** (0.148)	0.290** (0.127)
Observations	148	148	148	148	148	148	148	144	148
R ²	0.042	0.042	0.049	0.020	0.047	0.045	0.043	0.050	0.043
Adjusted R ²	0.029	0.022	0.029	0.006	0.028	0.018	0.016	0.023	0.016
Residual Std. Error	0.671 (df = 145)	0.673 (df = 144)	0.671 (df = 144)	0.679 (df = 145)	0.671 (df = 144)	0.675 (df = 143)	0.676 (df = 143)	0.680 (df = 139)	0.676 (df = 143)
F Statistic	3.179** (df = 2; 145)	2.114 (df = 3; 144)	2.463* (df = 3; 144)	1.478 (df = 2; 145)	2.390* (df = 3; 144)	1.685 (df = 4; 143)	1.591 (df = 4; 143)	1.835 (df = 4; 139)	1.591 (df = 4; 143)

Note:

* p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

RESULTS

It is found that only the years in power have statistically powerful results at a 95% confidence level, indicating that the longer the party is in power, the greater the amount of MPs losing or resigning the whip.

The null hypothesis for other factors could not be rejected.

CONCLUSION

The results show that there is a correlation between the time in power and more MPs losing or resigning the whip, offering a potential explanation of why parties fall out of power.

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